



# IRAQ: FEEDLOT PRODUCTION

PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY MEAT IN THE WAKE OF ISIS

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Between 2007 – 2010, Texas A&M University established 10 beef and lamb feedlots in Iraq under a contract for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) known as the *Inma* project. During this time, Iraq was in the midst of an economic boom. The country was relatively stable and secure, average household incomes had risen markedly, and all indicators pointed to a continuation of higher wages and improved standards of living. With more money in people's pockets, there was a high demand for red meat.

## PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY MEAT

At the time, however, the red meat supply was not dependable and the quality was low. Most of the meat was frozen beef imported from India. Barriers to high-quality beef production existed throughout the agricultural value chain. For instance:

- The breed of cattle in Iraq was not conducive to being confined and finished for quality;
- Quality feed and the understanding of how to create an effective feed mix was non-existent;
- Cattle productivity was negatively affected by wind and low temperatures; and
- Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) was prevalent, and there was little access to new vaccines.

In an effort to meet the demand for high quality red meat, feedlots were created to establish and enhance the red meat value chain.

In January 2016, ConDev Senior Advisor Tony Laos returned to Iraq to assess the operational status of these feedlots in the wake of the incursion of ISIS (also referred to as "Daesh").

## STATUS OF FEEDLOT OPERATIONS

The following is a brief description of each feedlot as well as their present status. Currently, only one of the feedlots is fully functioning, though all of the feedlots listed below were in operation as of 2011. Please note that, due to the ongoing turmoil and uncertainty surrounding the ISIS situation, some of this data is anecdotal.

### BLANN, DUHOK

This beef feedlot is located the Blann Valley in the province of Duhok. It stands as an example of the *Inma* project's significant

## THE INMA PROJECT

Texas A&M University staff working under the USAID *Inma* Agribusiness Program supervised and contracted with local producers in 6 Iraqi provinces: Ninewa, Duhok, Babylon, Wasit, Kirkuk and Anbar. Many of the feedlots were concentrated in the provinces of Ninewa and Kirkuk, since these provinces were robust agricultural areas and serve as the heart of the livestock industry in Iraq.

The goal of *Inma*, which means "growth" in Arabic, was to address agricultural issues while meeting market demand. The plan included fully constructing and stocking ten feedlots with a minimum of 400 head with a stocking weight of approximately 100 kilograms. Each feedlot produced 50 feeder calves every month.

In addition, the project supported lamb production. Lamb feedlots were also stocked at 400 animals with feeder lambs coming in at approximately 10 kg. Lambs were fed until they reached 35-40 kilograms and then sent to slaughter. By 2011, all 10 feedlots were fully functional and were owned and operated by Iraqi producers.

positive impact and, more generally, of what is possible even in conflict areas.

This feedlot operates under the management of Mr. Maamon Majeed. This young entrepreneur was able to convert a simple

feedlot project into a highly stable agricultural business in a conflict area by backward integrating into the value chain and then taking his products forward to the customer.

His food stores and agricultural operations are now known collectively as “Blann Bazar” ([www.blannbazar.com](http://www.blannbazar.com)), and his products are in demand throughout Iraq.

Last year, Blann Bazar obtained a certificate of acceptance for the sale of its products to the French-owned Carrefour Supermarket chain, which has large stores in Erbil and Duhok. This certificate allowed Blann Bazar to expand its markets. It also ensures that Blann Bazar maintains quality control regarding the safety and quality of food in all areas, as Carrefour constantly conducts Quality Analyses.

Mr. Majeed took an innovative approach to raising and selling high-quality beef. He began by back integrating into alfalfa and wheat to use for feed. He contracted with surrounding farmers to produce alfalfa and wheat and purchase feeder calves for his feedlot from them. To further broaden his markets, he then established a specialty butcher shop in the town center of Duhok, as the area lacked outlets for his higher quality beef. He visited Turkey to learn how high quality butchers operated.

As a result of these efforts, this young entrepreneur was able to introduce a new style of butcher shop to Iraq. He sought outside expertise, bringing an experienced butcher to Duhok to train his staff in the art of butchering cattle using the same methodology as in Europe.

After his butcher shop became operational, Majeed began to supply cut meat to restaurants and other butcher shops. His initial specialty butcher shop performed exceedingly well, and he expanded to two more. At that point, given his burgeoning customer base, he was able to add specialty cut lamb and staple dry goods to his list of product offerings. These additions, established around his specialty beef and lamb butcher shops, led him to develop fully integrated grocery stores collectively known as “Blann Bazar”. In these stores, he produces and sells a complete line of frozen and refrigerated foods including salamis, burgers and prepared products such as meat covered with a batter similar to a corn dog.

In the process of establishing his business, Mr. Majeed took over the state-owned slaughterhouse outside the city of Duhok that had been sitting idle for years. At this site, he now slaughters animals not only for local consumption but also for distribution to a broader region. To facilitate the transport of his products to surrounding areas, he has now accumulated a fleet of refrigerated delivery trucks.

What began as a small beef feedlot has since transformed into a large, integrated agricultural operation, from the production of feed to the production of high-quality beef and lamb. These products are sold throughout the country, from Erbil to cities such as Baghdad, Karbala and Kirkuk. Karbala is a particularly robust market for his products. It is the second largest tourist attraction for Shia Muslims, ranked after Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It still attracts visitors from around the world.



In Erbil, both The University of Duhok and Salahaddin University work closely with Mr. Majeed. Their students complete internships in the Blann Bazar, the feedlots and the slaughterhouse. Veterinary students are particularly active in the internship program, working at the feedlots and slaughterhouses under the tutelage of Blann Bazar’s veterinary staff.

Blann Bazar’s markets have been affected by the ISIS insurgency in Iraq. While its total revenues once exceeded \$5 million USD, these earnings have since been reduced significantly due to the businesses’ inability to transport its products to Mosul and other areas controlled by ISIS. Despite these challenges, Mr. Majeed is hopeful that he can continue to provide high-quality meats and other products throughout the country.

## **BARTILLA, NINEWA**

This feedlot remained operational until August 5, 2015. At the height of its operation, the site had 50 cows for feeder calves, 960 cattle, and 1400 sheep; it was back integrated into alfalfa and hay production and marketed products to butchers in Mosul and Erbil. The feedlot also served as an extension learning center for agricultural and veterinary students from the University of Mosul. Other producers used it to learn about the benefits of raising alfalfa and balancing feed rations into a pelleted feed. In addition, the proprietor established a livestock sale yard adjacent to the feedlot.

On August 5, 2015 at 1800 hours, however, ISIS took over the property. The producer was given two hours to flee with his family to Erbil as ISIS advanced. In the end, the producer left behind 800 tons of stored barley, wheat and alfalfa, along with all of his equipment and an operational feedlot. The feed was burned, and much of the feedlot was damaged by ISIS. Despite these hardships, the producer has expressed an interest in reestablishing the feedlot if ISIS can be driven from the area.

### **TALL KAYF, NINEWA**

This cattle feedlot was also seized by ISIS in 2015. The Peshmerga—i.e. the military forces of Iraqi Kurdistan—have established a front line against ISIS nearby. The proprietor has not still fully reestablished this operation due to the area's tenuous security situation.

### **RAS AL-JADA, NINEWA**

This location hosted a cattle feedlot, which remained in operation until the end of 2014. At that point in time, the area was seized by ISIS and the proprietor fled the country.

### **HILLA CITY, BABYLON**

This location was originally established as a lamb feedlot. While Mr. Laos was not able to locate anyone from this area during his visit, to the best of his knowledge, the feedlot remains operational.

*More photos at <https://flic.kr/s/aHskshT2ZZ>*



### **AL TAJI, BAGHDAD**

This lamb feedlot ceased operations three years ago due to the death of the proprietor.

### **AL-SAWEREA, WASIT**

Mr. Laos was unable to obtain any information concerning this feedlot. As such, he does not know if it is still functioning.

### **AL-GOBA, NINEWA**

This feedlot continued to operate until 2014. When ISIS invaded, the proprietor and his family fled to Turkey.

### **AL-BOETER, KIRKUK**

This feedlot produced cattle and sheep until early 2015, at which time ISIS seized this part of the province and the owner-operator fled with his family.

### **AL-FALUJAA, ANBAR**

This cattle feedlot in Al-Falujaa operated with feeder cattle that were being supplied by the large Bonia Dairy located on the outskirts of Baghdad. It successfully sold its meat to markets in Baghdad until ISIS took possession of it in 2014.

## **CONCLUSION**

The concept of establishing feedlots as the nucleus of a red meat value chain proved to be successful in Iraq despite the area's ongoing conflict. One key element of success was the allowance of a functioning free market. Today, most of the areas in which the feedlots were built have unfortunately been seized and destroyed by ISIS.

Success was also dependent upon the proprietors themselves: While some of the operators failed, others succeeded despite difficult conditions. Two operators, for instance, had a strong vision and demonstrated acute entrepreneurial skills. They looked outside of the box for opportunities and took risks to expand beyond the initial feedlot investment; while others did not. Despite ISIS, the initial \$1,000,000 investment from USAID has still positively impacted the Iraqi agriculture economy.

Today, Blann Bazar continues to expand and grow, even though markets have been curtailed and the future of Iraq remains in question. The proprietor, Mr. Majeed, remains confident and continues to pursue growth of all his areas of business as he continues to have faith in the growth of the Iraq. He proves that the agricultural development business model works with the right technical training and with motivated leadership. ∞

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**Tony Laos** serves as a Senior Advisor for the Center on Conflict and Development (ConDev) at Texas A&M University. An international development specialist with a career as an agribusiness executive, Mr. Laos possesses in-depth experience with an emphasis on seeds, genetics, livestock and extension. His commercial mindset and economic prowess has also enabled him to launch several successful business start-ups in the United States, Brazil and Iraq.

**The Center on Conflict and Development** at Texas A&M University seeks to improve the effectiveness of development programs and policies for conflict-affected and fragile countries through multidisciplinary research, education and development extension. ConDev uses science and technology to reduce armed conflict, sustain families and communities during conflict, and assist states to rapidly recover from conflict. [condevcenter.org](http://condevcenter.org)